The Social Questions Bulletin

Issued Monthly Except July and August by

THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE
(UNOFFICIAL)

An organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

150 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

Secretaries: HARRY F. WARD, CHARLES C. WEBBER, HELEN G. MURRAY

The general policies of this publication are determined by the Executive Committee of the Methodist Federation for Social Service, subject to approval by the General Council of the Federation. The selection of topics and material is committed to the Secretaries, who are responsible to the Federation and to the public for its accuracy.

Entered as second-class matter January 21, 1919, at the Postoffice at New York, N. Y. under Act of August 24, 1912.

Vol. 28 **SEPTEMBER, 1938** **No. 7**

FASCISM AND THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT

INTRODUCTION

Five years ago the MFSS prepared Bulletins on Fascism, Socialism, Liberalism and Communism. National and international developments since that time make desirable a review of these social programs.

Seldom in history have so many events of importance been crowded into half a decade. One has only to call to mind the New Deal, the N.I.R.A., the great development of the labor movement, the Liberty League, the Supreme Court fight, important social legislation, the development of tory and progressive blocks at the 1936 election, Labor's Non-Partisan League, the Senate investigations of munition manufacturers and of violations of civil liberties, the Chicago Massacre, Huey Long, Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend, and Mayor Hague to realize how rapidly and in what differing directions national forces have been developing.

Internationally, the conquest of Ethiopia, fascist invasions of Spain and China, the failure of the League of Nations, oil land expropriation in Mexico, fascist developments in Brazil and Quebec, the rape of Austria, the German threat to Czecho-Slovakia, the Fascist International, the Anti-Communist Pact, Tory control of England, increased Roman Catholic reaction, the United Front in France and Spain, the new Soviet Constitution, and United China recall to our minds the swift moving international scene.

Such tremendous socio-political activity demands a new analysis of fundamental political philosophies and techniques.

Our Billion Horsepower. The industrial era gave the world a billion productive horsepower. A few persons control this vast power for private profit. Service is a by-product. The profit margin of the capitalist progressively decreases the purchasing power of the masses, thus stalling industry, making an economic crisis. The World War showed the destructive nature of international capitalist competition, often called imperialism. Within a nation competition eliminates the weaker. But whole nations will not lie down and die when economically defeated. They react violently. The "victor" nations did not allow for the fierce death throes of dying nationalistic economics.

Fascism has been described as the crabbedness of a senile system. It is more. It developed as the desperate bid for life of the economically vanquished, but has been perfected as the technique for defending reaction against the forces of democratic growth which seek to free the billion horsepower from the control of those who would exploit it for personal gain.

Two Basic Factors. The fundamental problem of world politico-economics is to find a method of control that will release the billion horsepower which the industrial era has given the world, for productive use. Two methods are developing and both deal with concepts of private property.

Fascism further sanctifies private property by dedicating the state to the purpose of protecting the owner of the machines of production. Whatever interferes with productive activity as profitable to the owner is eliminated. It regulates labor and finds

Pacific School of Religion Berkeley, Calif.

markets. The state then becomes the tool of the capitalists in protecting their private ownership of productive property.

Socialism, on the other hand, recognizes the sacredness of private property only in terms of personal usefulness, and demands social ownership and democratic control of the natural resources and productive machinery. The state here is the organ of the people enforcing necessary limitations on private ownership.

Definitions. Before we go further, we will define our terms. Fascism as a term is used specifically and generally. Specifically it means the party control of Italy under Mussolini. Generally, it means the economic or political effort of toryism to protect the profit system against the mass pressure for more democratic control of the social, economic and political life.

Socialism is specifically a scientific term to designate the social ownership and democratic control of natural resources and means of production. The word is often used to designate political groups that work toward that end. Communism is the ultimate form of socialism. Generally communism means the political party working for the communist society. In the Soviet Union today the communists are working for socialism. In the United States both terms, communism and socialism, are usually political terms labelling the techniques of various groups working for socialism.

FASCISM

Purpose. When the ownership and control of productive machinery and natural resources are threatened by the expanding of the democratic principle, the "vested interests" react to protect themselves. They do two things. They try to defend the forces that gave them power, the *status quo* or *laissez-faire* economics, and secondly, they try to curtail the development of democratic forces. Fascism exists to protect capitalism. It is the political expression of the most advanced stage of capitalist economy trying to overcome its contradictions by removing those things it has pointed to as its great achievements, but which now threaten its power.

How it Works. Fascism aids capitalism in two ways. It removes the threats and tries to create a stimulus. Capitalism needs markets for surpluses so that production may be profitable to industry. Fascism creates markets at home and abroad. For instance, Italy expands in Ethiopia, and seeks to control the Mediterranean as its own market. While this goes on abroad, it regiments the masses of Italy, draining resources even to wedding rings, to guarantee a profit to the corporations that are producing the machines of warfare needed to conquer the markets. So the state as a tool of private industry makes sure the capitalist wins both ways, now and in the future. Germany has followed a similar pattern with expansion toward Austria and South Africa, and heavy taxation for armaments at home. So also Japan.

Technique. Force is an essential. Force is needed to overpower opposition groups, to suppress civil liberties, to control propaganda, to manacle education and religion. An army is needed for expansion. Military service is demanded of men. Child-bearing is urged upon women. The state is totalitarian. Its control over citizens is unlimited. A new ethic of national supremacy supercedes Christian ethics. The ultimate good is what is good for the state. Force based on a pagan philosophy makes possible external expansion and internal exploitation. Opposition leadership is stifled. Discontent is kept leaderless. The national program is made attractive through promises and appeals to national gratification. Failures are blamed on minority groups whose persecution diverts attention from the actual state of affairs.

Fascist Planning. Fascism has no plan except to keep industry from stalling. It is a cardinal fascist doctrine that private enterprise be preserved and fostered. It is essentially political, not economic. It maintains the political atmosphere under which capitalist economic enterprise can exist. It prevents strikes, fixes wages, regulates labor conditions, and furnishes arbitration machinery. It limits freedom of investment for the sake of efficiency in war preparations thus developing a struggle for power between the financial hierarchy and the political bureaucracy.

In Italy control is functional through corporations under direct authority of Mussolini. In Germany many little *fuehrers* control various industries in line with fascist policy. Limitations are placed on banking and currency circulation. Agriculture is speeded up to meet national emergencies created by failure of foreign credit. Consumer's cooperatives are disbanded. Basically there is no serious economic planning. Discipline and restraints exist only to make the country safe for capitalism and effective in war.

Fascism and War. War is necessary for fascist expansion—see Ethiopia, Spain, Austria and China. The best proof of Strachey's thesis that fascism inevitably leads to war is to look at the wars in the world today, and in the last five years. All have fascist roots.

Goal. Fascism leads a hand to mouth existence. Each fascist state visions an expansion that will meet its needs, but expansion brings more needs, and calls for more expansion, and so on *ad infinitum.* Hitler speaks of inhabiting the continent of

Europe with 250 million Germans in less than a hundred years. Each new day calls for new diplomatic juggling, deceit, intrigue and international lawlessness. The program seems to be to use every method and means available to compensate for the contradictions of capitalist economy and ward off the ultimate collapse as long as possible. There is no goal of restored civil rights, or of relieved pressure on minorities or oppositionists, or of truth in education, or of freedom of speech and press and worship.

International Fascism. Fascism is intensely nationalistic. International fascism is a contradiction, but it exists temporarily by agreement, as sinister capitalist forces during the War united for exploitation through munition sales. Fascism fears the democracies and Soviet Russia. By uniting against them it can gain more than by fighting separately. (Example—Spain 1936-7-8.) The Soviet Union presents the greatest danger for it represents advanced economic democracy which is developing rapidly, free from the economic contradictions of fascism. The Anti-Communist Pact is the international fascist attack against the USSR. Germany looks toward the Ukraine, Japan toward Siberia, Italy toward Spain. United they can come closer to their objectives than divided. But ultimately the intense nationalism of fascism will destroy its international venture.

FASCISM IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States has been rich in resources with plenty of room for expansion. Conditions have been so favorable for capitalistic development that its contradictions have not been so glaring. For 150 years capitalism has entrenched itself behind statutes and legal interpretations favorable to the owner of productive property. Capital has controlled government. Radical interpretations of property have gained little ground. The major and sustained collapse of 1929 changed that. Although reaction used press, radio and economic pressure to confuse issues, the great mass of American people have found themselves and are moving toward a more democratic control of wealth.

The Pattern. This threat to American capital brought into the open the form of American fascism. It had been germinating for years and needed only the occasion to bring it to life. An abortive fascist "March on Washington" revealed that a minority group representing capital was trying intrigue, falsehood and red-baiting to negate the mandate of the electorate.

Four elements are needed, and we have them all—leaders—storm troopers—guns—money. A commander of the American Legion once said, "If ever needed, the American Legion stands ready to protect our country's institutions and ideals as the Fascists dealt with the destructionists who menaced Italy." The Legion seems ready—all it needs is a good red scare. Guns are no problem to any group friendly to the army and sponsored by leading munition manufacturers. Hearst, Ford, and the Liberty League have money and would probably not be averse to supporting a super-patriotic movement to make private property more sacred. Everything is there but the man on the white horse. Even he may be ready by now. The attempt to get General Smedley Butler to lead the march failed because he recognized treason. But evidently the Senate committee that investigated General Butler's testimony was afraid to act. (For details see George Seldes—You Can't Do That—pp. 171-215.) Does it not seem strange that our numerous committees for investigating unAmerican activities failed to act at such a happy prospect of revealing a treasonable conspiracy?

Numerous organizations have fascist leanings. The Liberty League, the American Legion, The American Navy League, the National Security League, the D.A.R., the Crusaders, various vigilante groups, some fraternal, and most super patriotic groups have definite leanings. They are aided by sections of the press and such journals as *American Mercury* and *American Review.*

A war would bring fascist controls. Even a severe crisis with a good red scare might turn the trick. The method is clear. Organize an armed minority, strike opportunistically, use force, and pave the way with a false crusade against radicals to confuse issues and win the sympathy of the majority who misunderstand the meaning and purpose of communist control. The state controls of progressive legislation, combined with a misuse of "law and order" can lead to a "democratic" dictatorship, in the more advanced countries.

THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT

The other force seeking control of the billion horsepower is socialism. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is the only socialist state in the world. What is its program, and how is it bringing it to realization?

Purpose. Socialism seeks to bring to the masses the benefits of industrialization through social ownership and democratic control. Where there is no democratic tradition, party control is instituted to establish economic and social democracy while the political democracy is being progressively developed. The new Soviet Constitution shows the advances made toward increased political democracy. While it is a totalitarian state in nature during the period of transition from capitalism to socialism, its totalitarianism has the opposite purpose from fascism. Socialism is the democratic state in the process of establishing a continually developing people's control over the

whole of life. Fascism is an authoritarian state which denies the value of the people's control and eliminates it.

Planning. Soviet Russia is the one country in which any thorough going attempt to institute a planned economy has been made. The key to Soviet planning is social ownership. The planning involves agriculture, heavy industry, consumer goods, banking and social insurance. The Council of Labor and Defense correlates labor, industry and defense. Under it the Supreme Economic Council deals with industrial production and control. The State Planning Board is advisory, while the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Executive Committee exert executive control. All these groups are sensitive to pressure and suggestion from the people's press, the party and labor unions. Citizens are educated to participate. The program has brought Russia from a place of backwardness to a place of power.

War. The USSR proposed total disarmament to the League of Nations. When its proposal was rejected it developed an army of defense. It signed a series of mutual assistance pacts to limit war danger. Though it has been invaded many times during twenty years it has not once invaded another country. Its army is dedicated to protecting the development of socialism in Russia. It opposes war as destructive to the people's interests, but is prepared to use a defensive program against the tactics of fascism which it believes destructive to these interests. Fascism glorifies war as an end in itself. Socialism uses it regretfully as a last defensive means.

Call for People's Front Against Fascism. The Communist International realized that the spread of fascism meant the loss of the democratic processes through which the masses in other countries could entend their control and ownership of national wealth and productive resources. In order to check the fascist threat it was willing to unite with less progressive groups to defend democratic processes. It urged a united front of all progressive and liberal groups for a common purpose. In France and Spain liberal parties and parties of the left have united and checked and actively opposed the trend toward fascism.

THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT IN THE UNITED STATES

The last five years have seen notable developments in popular interest in democratic rights. Lessons learned from Spain and China, and the growing consciousness of the dangers of fascism have stimulated preventative action. Victories at the polls, growth of the labor movement, and the movement toward independent political action have been the result. The American League for Peace and Democracy, whose last Congress represented over four million people, illustrates the development.

The Program. A four point program is emerging from national need and interest. First, is the demand for improved wage, hour and working conditions for industrial workers and wage earners, to raise the living standard and guarantee purchasing power. Second, is the demand that natural resources be used to provide work and relief for the jobless, to build social security legislation, farm relief, slum clearance, home protection, and extensive social services. Third, is the demand for protection of civil liberties and an extension of them under law to protect the growth of democratic control. Fourth, is the program of international collective security to safeguard the growing world democracy from the fascist program of "divide and conquer."

The Make-up. The Democratic front is in the state of organization and development. Characteristic of it is the willingness to sacrifice some aims for the benefits of unity and strength. The Farmer Labor Party, the Progressive Party of the Middle West, The American Labor Party of New York, the Commonwealth Federation of Washington, Labor's Non-Partisan League, and labor unions added to the parties of the left make up the front.

Socialist Party. The Socialist Party is weakened by defections and splits. The Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Labor Party and the Social Democratic Federation are separate from the Socialist Party. These groups are in general not powerful, except in a few localized areas. The Socialist Party itself is split into three groups, the Thomas-Altman group, the Appeal group and the Clarity group.

Communist Party. The Communist Party is working vigorously for the democratic front, and is withdrawing its own candidates whenever a united front candidate is nominated.

Liberal Support. Most liberals are clear as to their choice between fascism and socialism in terms of the ultimate, but many are unwilling to give support to the realistic program that works toward that ultimate. Problems of pacifism, collective security and force bother them. While they ponder, the most ruthless force in years is being used to remove even their right to know the truth and ponder. Realism calls for action to check fascism through the democratic front. Where do you stand?

The united front is an attempt to maintain and use the democratic benefits of liberal capitalism in order that society, through orderly processes, may be more thoroughly socialized.

We are indebted for this issue to Edgar Jackson of Thomaston, Conn.